

MAY 18, 1978

On the skylight above, soft rain is falling in a healing lightness that is interceding in a long, dry winter. Over in the corner of the room, a black and white television set monitors the weather report along the bottom of the screen: Midland radar has spotted a band of severe thunderstorms "from just west of San Angelo to the city of Barnhart."

The ranch is in that area. The ranch is also in desperate need of a severe change in both thunderstorms and watching. The land needs the water and the owners need to stop peering into the horizons.

Seems to me that weathermen call everything from a backwash on a fishpond to a four-o'clock dew severe weather. Severe thunderstorm watching is the principal characteristic of a drouth. From the time the skies clear until the rains come, herders start watching for thunderstorms with an intensity that'd made the head fire ranger of the Big Thicket think he'd been sidelined for an eye check. Old boys out here that can't read the ads in the Yellow Pages spot whirlwinds as far off as the Texas Panhandle. Anytime a fellow wants to qualify for a severe weather watcher he ought to try on a pair of boots that have been worn out riding in a feed wagon.

The worst fall I ever saw off a horse was caused from watching a thunder cloud. It hadn't rained for 18 months. A little cloud built up in the east of where we were working. A fellow paying the bills on the outfit got to leaning so far over his saddle horn peering toward the clouds that he spurred his horse into a bucking fit. He never was able to convince anyone how it happened. As long as I knew that man afterward, he never wore his spurs on a cloudy day.

Rain has been scattered in the Shortgrass Country. Too much dry country still exists. Some hombres say they are quitting the first of June. All spring long there's been deep culling in a lot of herds.

We didn't have television in the drouth of the '50s. Weather reports came on the radio, but I think all they had to do was to rewrite their copy about every three months.

There's no way of saying how grateful I am for the severe weather. Melted hail stones beat powdered dust. It'll break the drouth one of these days. The question now is how many of us are going to be broke before it happens.